

## Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 743

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TEGUCIGALPA 3237

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, HO

SUBJECT: ANALYSIS OF GOVERNMENT

REF: TEGUCIGALPA 1818, 2509

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR MUST BE RESPONSIVE TO THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL EVEN THOUGH HE HAS BEEN GIVEN GREATER LATITUDE TO DEAL WITH CONTINUING PROBLEMS. THE LT. COLONELS IN THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL ARE NOT GUIDED BY ANY COMMON IDEOLOGICAL VIEWPOINT ALTHOUGH THE MAJORITY HOLD GENERALLY MODERATE BELIEFS. RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES AND THE GOVERNMENT HAVE BEEN FRIENDLY AND WE DO NOT FORESEE SERIOUS PROBLEMS DEVELOPING THAT WOULD CHANGE THE SITUATION. A FUNDAMENTAL CONSIDERATION IN TERMS OF FUTURE DEVELOPMENT IS THAT THE MILITARY WILL CONTINUE TO BE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL FORCE IN THE COUNTRY. HOWEVER, IDEOLOGICAL DIS-UNITY COMBINED WITH THE INHERENT DIFFICULTY OF GOVERNING  
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THROUGH A COLLEGIAL BODY RAISES A QUESTION ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT'S LONG-TERM VIABILITY IN ITS PRESENT FORM. END SUMMARY.

1. THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR MUST BE RESPONSIVE TO THE LT. COLONELS OF THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL (SDC). THERE IS NO EVIDENCE THAT HE HAS DEVELOPED A BASE OF SUPPORT THAT WOULD ALLOW HIM TO ACT INDEPENDENTLY OF THEM. IT IS LIKELY HE WOULD BE REMOVED IF HE APPEARS TO BE ACTING CONTRARY TO THEIR WISHES OR IF HIS ACTIONS COULD BE CONSTRUED BY THEM AS A POSSIBLE THREAT. HOWEVER, HE HAS BEEN ABLE TO OBTAIN AUTHORIZATION FROM THEM FOR GREATER TACTICAL FREEDOM TO DEAL WITH CONTINUING PROBLEMS. FOR EXAMPLE, GREATER LATITUDE WAS GIVEN HIM TO DEAL WITH THE UNC (NATIONAL UNION OF CAMPESINOS) HUNGER MARCH, THE RESULTING ARMY-CAMPESINO CONFRONTATION IN OLANCHO AND THE AFTERMATH OF THE INCIDENT. IT BECAME EVIDENT TO THE LT. COLONELS THAT THEY COULD NOT BE IN SESSION IN TEGUCIGALPA ON A CONTINUOUS BASIS BECAUSE IT WOULD REQUIRE THEM TO VIRTUALLY ABANDON THEIR MILITARY RESPONSIBILITIES, PARTICULARLY FOR THOSE WHOSE UNITS ARE LOCATED FAR FROM THE CAPITAL. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT WITH TIME MELGAR WILL BE ABLE TO STRENGTHEN HIS OWN POWER POSITION IF THE COUNCIL CONTINUES TO GIVE HIM AUTHORITY TO DEAL WITH SITUATIONS SUCH AS THE OLANCHO INCIDENT.

2. AS POINTED OUT IN REFTELS, THE LT. COLONELS ARE NOT GUIDED BY ANY COMMON IDEOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW. THERE ARE OFFICERS IN THE GROUP WHO REPRESENT OPINIONS RANGING ACROSS THE SPECTRUM FROM RELATIVELY RIGHTIST TO MODERATE LEFT, ALTHOUGH THE MAJORITY ARE CENTRIST IN OUTLOOK. THERE HAVE BEEN CHARGES THAT THERE IS A GROUP OF OFFICERS WHO ARE "LEFTIST" AND ARE INTERESTED IN A "PERUVIAN" SOLUTION FOR HONDURAS. THESE OFFICERS INCLUDE: LT. COLONEL MARIO MALDONADO MUNOZ (NOT A MEMBER OF THE SDC), EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL AGRARIAN INSTITUTE; LT. COLONEL MARIO LEONEL FONSECA, COMMANDER OF THE FRANCISCO MORAZAN MILITARY ACADEMY; LT. COLONEL JUAN RAMON MOLINA CISEROS, COMMANDER OF THE FIRST ARTILLERY BATTALION; AND LT. COLONEL MARCO A. ROSALES ABELLA, COMMANDER OF THE ELEVENTH INFANTRY BATTALION. THOSE MAKING THE CHARGES BELIEVE THAT ALTHOUGH THE "LEFTIST" OFFICERS ARE FEW IN NUMBER THEY EXERT A DISPROPORTIONATE AMOUNT OF INFLU-  
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ENCE WITHIN THE LT. COLONELS GROUP. THESE OFFICERS HAVE PRESSED FOR AGRARIAN REFORM AND PRESUMABLY THIS IS WHY THEY ARE LABELED LEFTISTS. HOWEVER, AGRARIAN REFORM IS AN ISSUE NOT NECESSARILY CHARACTERIZED BY "RIGHT" OR "LEFT". AGRARIAN REFORM, WHICH WAS BEGUN UNDER THE LOPEZ GOVERNMENT, IS BEING SUPPORTED BY THE LT. COLONELS BECAUSE THEY BELIEVE THAT IT IS NECESSARY IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE ECONOMIC PROGRESS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE, THEREBY REDUCING PRESSURES IN THE RURAL AREAS.

3. ONE MAJOR CHARACTERISTIC OF THE LT. COLONELS IS THAT THEY ARE RELATIVELY INEXPERIENCED IN DEALING WITH GOVERNMENTAL PROBLEMS AND THEY FACE THE MANY FRUSTRATIONS IN-

HERENT IN DEALING WITH THE SERIOUS PROBLEMS AFFECTING HONDURAS. BASICALLY, THEY ASSUMED POWER THINKING IN TERMS OF SIMPLISTIC SOLUTIONS. IN ADDITION, THEY ARE TRYING TO EXERCISE GREATER CONTROL OVER THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS THAN DID THE LOPEZ REGIME IN TERMS OF GENEGAL POLICY FORMATION. ONE OF THE GREATEST DIFFICULTIES HAS BEEN THE LACK OF A LIAISON MECHANISM BETWEEN THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS AND THE SDC. THIS SITUATION HAS PRODUCED A COMMUNICATIONS GAP BECAUSE THE TECHNICAL EXPERTISE OF THE MINISTERS HAS NOT BEEN UTILIZED EXTENSIVELY BY THE SDC IN DEVELOPING POLICY DECISIONS. THE SDC HAS ATTEMPTED TO RECTIFY THIS PROBLEM BY BEGINNING TO HAVE PERIODIC MEETINGS WITH MINISTERS AND OTHER OFFICIALS ON OUTSTANDING PROBLEMS CONFRONTING THE GOVERNMENT. THE SDC MEMBERS HOPE THAT THE NEW ARRANGEMENT WILL PERMIT A MORE EFFECTIVE MESHING OF THE OVERALL DECISION-MAKING FUNCTION OF THE SDC WITH THE ACTIONS OF THE CHIEF OF STATE AND THE GOVERNMENTAL APPARATUS.

4. THE GOVERNMENT HAS REITERATED ITS DETERMINATION TO MAINTAIN THE POLICY OF SEEKING A "GLOBAL AND SIMULTANEOUS" SETTLEMENT OF THE ISSUES INVOLVED IN THE DISPUTE WITH EL SALVADOR. THE LT. COLONELS, CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR AND FONMIN GALVEZ ARE ALL DESIROUS OF REACHING AN AGREEMENT WITH EL SALVADOR AS LONG AS SUCH AN AGREEMENT PROTECTS WHAT THEY BELIEVE TO BE NATIONAL TERRITORY AND SOVEREIGNTY. THEY HAVE SHOWN NO INTEREST IN ADOPTING A PIECEMEAL APPROACH TO NEGOTIATIONS, THAT IS, IN ESTABLISHING DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS OR OPENING HIGHWAY COMMUNICATIONS PRIOR TO THE CONCLUSION OF AN OVERALL AGREEMENT. THE RECENT MEETING AT EL POY BETWEEN CHIEF OF

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STATE MELGAR AND PRESIDENT MOLINA DID LITTLE BUT ESTABLISH A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO MEN AND REAFFIRM THE POLICY OF MAINTAINING CONTACT BETWEEN THE MILITARY COMMANDS TO AMELIORATE BORDER PROBLEMS. WE BELIEVE THAT THE POSSIBILITY OF ANY RAPID SOLUTION OF THE DISPUTE IS REMOTE ALTHOUGH THE RESUMPTION OF SOME FORM OF BILATERAL NEGOTIATIONS IS POSSIBLE.

5. THE MELGAR REGIME IS FACING A DIFFICULT ECONOMIC SITUATION. THE DESTRUCTION OF HURRICANE FIFI CAUSED A PREDICTED NEGATIVE RATE OF GROWTH IN 1975 OF 3 PER CENT AND A PROLONGATION OF THE CURRENT DROUGHT WILL DRAW THIS FIGURE LOWER, PERHAPS DOWN TO 7# PER CENT. IN THE LARGE SUBSISTENCE AGRICULTURE SECTOR OF THE ECONOMY, THE DROUGHT IMPACT IS FAR GREATER THAN THE GNP LOSS WOULD INDICATE. THE GOVERNMENT

MUST MOBILIZE ITSELF AND SEEK EXTERNAL HELP TO AVERT FAMINE AMONG TENS OF THOUSANDS OF CAMPESINOS. INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTION ASSISTANCE GENERATED FOLLOWING FIFI PROVIDES AN ELEMENT OF FINANCIAL STRENGTH, ALTHOUGH LAGS IN UTILIZATION OF THESE PROGRAM FUNDS IS PERTURBING CURRENT FOREIGN EXCHANGE

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OPERATIONS AND CAUSING PROBLEMS IN INTERNAL MONETARY ADJUSTMENTS. ADDITIONAL INTERNATIONAL BORROWING, ESPECIALLY IF PL 480 LOANS ARE AVAILABLE, SHOULD FINANCE THE FOOD SHORTAGE WITHOUT DESTROYING THE CURRENTY. NECESSARILY, PERHAPS, THE IFI FLOWS HAVE THE EFFECT OF SUPPORTING INCREASINGLY DOMINANT ECONOMIC STATISM. AREAS FOR PRIVATE INVESTMENT HAVE BEEN FURTHER NARROWED BY THE FORESTRY AND AGRARIAN LAWS OF THE PREVIOUS REGIME. INVESTOR CONFIDENCE, LOW UNDER THE LOPEZ REGIME, REMAINS PLAGUED BY UNCERTAINTY AND THE INSTABILITY OF THE MELGAR GOVERNMENT. SEVERAL FOREIGN INVESTORS, NOTICEABLY JAPANESE AND U.S., ARE ACTING AGAINST THE TIDE OF LOW CONFIDENCE, BUT PROBABLE DISINVESTMENT BY BANANA COMPANIES WILL RESULT IN LITTLE OR NO NET INFLOW OF PRIVATE CAPITAL. THE LOPEZ GOVERNMENT'S FIVE-YEAR PLAN GOALS ARE TO BECOME INDICATIVE RATHER THAN DIRECTIVE AND WILL BE DETAILED IN PRACTICAL ONE-YEAR PROGRAMS AND SHORT-TERM GOVERNMENT FISCAL AND MONE-TARY POLICY. THIS TYPE OF ACTION PLUS MUCH IMPROVED PRIVATE SECTOR ACCESS TO THE PRESENT MINISTERS ARE USEFUL, BUT DO NOT AT PRESENT OUTWEIGH THE NEGATIVE FACTORS RESULTING IN

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LACK OF INVESTOR CONFIDENCE.

6. AGRARIAN REFORM IS ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT AND CONTEN-

TIOUS PROBLEMS CONFRONTING THE GOVERNMENT. THE COMPLEXITY OF THE ISSUE IS FURTHER COMPOUNDED BY THE FACT THAT THE REGULATIONS TO IMPLEMENT THE AGRARIAN REFORM LAW HAVE NOT YET BEEN ISSUED. FOR EXAMPLE, THE STRIFE IN OLANCHO GREW OUT OF A CAMPESINO HUNGER MARCH THAT WAS INITIATED BY THE CHRISTIAN DEMOCRAT UNC (NATIONAL UNION OF CAMPESINOS) TO PRESSURE THE GOVERNMENT INTO LAND MORE QUICKLY AND UNDER DIFFERENT CONDITIONS THAN THOSE OF THE PRESENT AGRARIAN REFORM LAW. THE GOVERNMENT DECIDED TO ACT FIRMLY AND, AS A RESULT, THE ARMY TURNED BACK THE MARCHERS AND A NUMBER OF CAMPESINO LEADERS WERE IMPRISONED. IN OLANCHO, THE SITUATION RESULTED IN TWO PRIESTS, TWO WOMEN AND A NUMBER OF UNC MEMBERS BEING MURDERED. THE HIGH LEVEL MILITARY COMMISSION THAT INVESTIGATED THE INCIDENT ACCUSED MILITARY PERSONNEL AND LOCAL LANDOWNERS OF THE ATROCITY. THE KILLINGS PROBABLY TOOK PLACE IN REACTION TO THE HUNGER MARCH AND GENERALIZED CAMPESINO AGITATION. THE CHURCH, STUDENTS AND CAMPESINO ORGANIZATIONS HAVE STRONGLY CONDEMNED THE INCIDENT AND DEMANDED THAT THOSE GUILTY OF THE ATROCITY BE PUNISHED. THE OLANCHO INCIDENT HAS PLACED THE GOVERNMENT IN AN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT POSITION BECAUSE IT UNITED THE CHURCH, CAMPESINOS AND STUDENTS AGAINST IT ON THE BASIS OF ATROCITIES IN WHICH MILITARY PERSONNEL ARE ACCUSED OF TAKING PART. THE GOVERNMENT HAS REPEATEDLY STATED THAT THOSE GUILTY OF CRIMES WILL BE PUNISHED. THE REGIME HAS TAKEN THIS POSITION IN AN EFFORT TO CALM THE SITUATION AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE; HOWEVER, THERE IS NO QUESTION BUT THAT ITS PRESTIGE HAS BEEN DAMAGED BY THE OLANCHO EVENTS.

7. THE PRESENT REGIME HAS LITTLE MASS SUPPORT. THE LOPEZ GOVERNMENT AT LEAST HAD A CLAIM OF BEING SUPPORTED BY THE CAMPESINO ORGANIZATIONS AND THE LABOR UNIONS, BUT THE MELGAR

GOVERNMENT CANNOT BOAST EVEN THAT ACHIEVEMENT. THE CONDITIONAL SUPPORT GIVEN TO THE GOVERNMENT BY THE CAMPESINO AND LABOR GROUPS AT ITS ONSET HAS BEEN REPLACED BY AN UNEASY NEUTRALITY OR OPEN REJECTION. THE STUDENTS WERE SUSPICIOUS OF THE GOVERNMENT AT ITS INCEPTION AND HAVE BECOME EVEN MORE CONVINCED OF ITS "REACTIONARY" NATURE AFTER THE OLANCHO INCIDENT.

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CIDENTS. THE POLITICAL PARTIES VIEW THE PRESENT SITUATION AS PROPITIOUS FOR PRESSURING FOR A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONALITY, FREE ELECTIONS AND THE EXERCISE OF GOVERNMENTAL POWER BY THE PARTIES. HOWEVER, ALL PUBLIC DECLARATIONS BY THE REGIME TO DATE STATE THAT THERE WOULD NOT BE A RETURN TO NORMAL CONSTITUTIONAL PROCESSES UNTIL "THE COUNTRY IS READY". THERE ARE DIFFERING VIEWS WITHIN THE LT. COLONELS GROUP ABOUT AN EVENTUAL RETURN TO FREE ELECTIONS, BUT THERE IS NO INDICATION THAT ANY OF THEM ARE THINKING ABOUT ELECTIONS SOON.

8. RELATIONS BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE GOVERNMENT HAVE BEEN FRIENDLY, AS WAS THE CASE DURING THE LOPEZ REGIME.

WE DO NOT FORESEE SERIOUS PROBLEMS DEVELOPING THAT WOULD CHANGE THE SITUATION. THERE WILL CONTINUE TO BE IRRITANTS IN OUR DEALING WITH THE GOVERNMENT, BUT IT IS UNLIKELY THAT SUCH PROBLEMS WILL BECOME SIGNIFICANTLY MORE SEVERE, AT LEAST IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE.

9. A FUNDAMENTAL CONSIDERATION IN TERMS OF FUTURE DEVELOPMENT IS THAT THE MILITARY WILL CONTINUE TO BE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT POLITICAL FORCE IN THE COUNTRY. HOWEVER, THE LT. COLONELS WHO ARE NOW DIRECTING GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS ARE AGREED ON LITTLE OTHER THAN THAT THERE SHOULD BE A HIGH DEGREE OF MILITARY INFLUENCE IN GOVERNMENT. THEY ARE NOT IDEOLOGICALLY UNITED AND HAVE NO AGREED UPON LONG-RANGE PLAN FOR THE FUTURE. THE SERIES OF DISASTERS THAT HONDURAS HAS SUFFERED HAS NOW EXTENDED TO INCLUDE THE OLANCHO MASSACRE AND THE DISASTROUS DROUGHT FACING THE COUNTRY. THE LT. COLONELS ARE LEARNING THE HARD WAY ABOUT THE FRUSTRATIONS AND DIFFICULTIES OF RULING A COUNTRY, SOMETHING THEY HAD NOT FULLY APPRECIATED PRIOR TO ASSUMING POWER. COMPLICATING THE SITUATION IS THE STRONG POSSIBILITY THAT INTERNAL FRICTIONS WITHIN THE LT. COLONELS GROUP COMBINED WITH INDIVIDUAL AMBITIONS COULD INCREASINGLY FACTIONALIZE IT WITH A RESULTING LOSS OF UNITY. THIS DISUNITY COMBINED WITH THE INHERENT DIFFICULTY OF GOVERNING THROUGH A COLLEGIAL BODY RAISES A QUESTION ABOUT THE GOVERNMENT'S LONG-RANGE VIABILITY IN ITS PRESENT FORM. THERE ARE SEVERAL POSSIBILITIES APART FROM A LONG-TERM CONTINUANCE OF THE PRESENT SYSTEM. ONE WOULD BE A RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONALITY AND FREE ELECTIONS, PRESUMABLY AFTER SEVERAL YEARS OF PREPARATION UNDER THE EXISTING SYSTEM. CONFIDENTIAL

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ANOTHER WOULD BE THE FORMATION OF A MILITARY OR MILITARY-CIVILIAN JUNTA TO EXERCISE POWER. THE MOST UNLIKELY, GIVEN THE LACK OF TECHNICAL EXPERTISE AND MANPOWER, WOULD BE TO STAFF THE GOVERNMENT WITH MILITARY PERSONNEL AND MAKE IT INTO A COMPLETELY MILITARY REGIME. IT IS STILL TOO EARLY AT THIS STAGE TO ESTIMATE WHICH ROUTE THE LT. COLONELS WILL EVENTUALLY CHOOSE. SANCHEZ

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